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ABSTRACT

The Tacoma Public Schools Early Childhood Program is a comprehensive effort to give economically disadvantaged children an early education program which will have continuity and long-range effectiveness. Involving 5 years of education (3-year-olds through grade 3), the program uses the Responsive Environment Model, which has as its objectives the development of the child's positive self-image and his intellectual ability. Sources of more detailed information are provided for this program, specifically, and for Model Programs Childhood Education, in general. (Author/NH)

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Model Programs

Childhood Education

Tacoma Public Schools Early Childhood Program

Tacoma, Washington

Combined local, State, and Federal funds support a large-scale early childhood program in the public schools

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
Elliot L. Richardson, *Secretary*
Office of Education
Terrel H. Bell, *Acting Commissioner of Education*
OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
Donald Rumsfeld, *Director*

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FOREWORD

This booklet is one of 34 in a series of promising programs on childhood education prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. The series was written under contract by the American Institutes for Research for the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the Office of Child Development and the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Within the broad area of childhood education the series includes descriptions of programs on reading and language development, the disadvantaged, preschool education, and special education. In describing a program, each booklet provides details about the purpose; the children reached; specific materials, facilities, and staff involved; and other special features such as community services, parental involvement, and finances. Sources of further information on the programs are also provided.

Tacoma, Wash., like many cities today, faced the problem of trying to provide an early childhood education program for economically disadvantaged children which would have continuity and be more than just temporarily effective. Clearly a large-scale effort was needed, but how could it be coordinated and financed? Tacoma found its answer in a comprehensive approach, involving 5 years of early childhood education, supported by pooling funds from Head Start, Follow Through, and title I (Elementary and Secondary Education Act), and from other State and local sources. The program is presently serving over 600 children, 3-year-olds to third graders, in Head Start day care centers, Head Start preschool classes, Follow Through kindergarten and first-grade classes, and a title I primary enrichment program.

The unified approach is achieved by using a single curriculum model, based on the Responsive Environment Model developed by Dr. Glen Nimnicht of the Far West Laboratory in Berkeley, Calif. In this model children are free to pursue activities which interest them, not because of some extrinsic reward system, but because the activities themselves are rewarding. There appears to be little difference between play and learning: instead, children

learn through creative play, extending their play experiences to new learning situations.

Teachers and aides, many from the low-income population, create a responsive environment in the classroom. While working in the program, they can also earn credits toward degrees in early childhood education and eventually gain full accreditation as elementary teachers through a cooperative arrangement with several area colleges.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

To support its economy Tacoma, a city of over 150,000 people, is basically dependent both upon industries--such as aviation, lumber, paper products, and aluminum--and upon military installations. A large proportion of the population is in the low-income range. Six years ago the principals of elementary schools that served the low-income areas became increasingly aware that youngsters from these areas were not as well prepared for beginning school as their middle-class counterparts. They applied for Head Start funds under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to initiate a preschool program for these youngsters, and the program began in 1965. In 1968, when it became evident that for lasting gains

the program must be sustained until the children were well established in school, the district added a Follow Through project.

In order to offer a meaningful and well-integrated early childhood educational program, Tacoma officials chose the Responsive Environment Model developed by the Far West Laboratory. Dr. Glen Nimnicht and his staff at the laboratory worked closely with the schools in planning and implementing the program, provided staff training procedures, and administered tests to evaluate the progress of children in the responsive model classrooms.

"RESPONSIVE" CLASSROOMS

The Responsive Environment Model is based on three essential principles--that children learn at different rates, that they learn in different ways, and that they learn best when they are interested in what they are learning. The primary objectives of the approach are to help children develop a positive self-image and to help them develop their intellectual ability. The classroom environment is called "responsive" because it is designed to respond to the child.

The classroom is organized into several learning areas to allow children to freely pursue what they are interested in. A child may go from one area to another, spending as much time as he wants to with the activities in each area. Activities and materials are carefully structured to provide stimulating and rewarding experiences. Children engage in a particular activity because they want to and only for as long as they want to. At the same time, however, the activities are designed to pose problems and encourage discovery of their solutions, in the belief that problem solving is the essence of learning. In the process, the child gains new insights about the physical and social world in which he lives.

FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Tacoma has used all available space to implement its Head Start and Follow Through programs. In older schools walls were knocked out where necessary; new equipment was installed in previously unused storage spaces; and several abandoned buildings were refurbished for use as learning centers. Staffs have done amazing things with these facilities to make them compatible with a truly responsive environment.

A typical classroom may contain a listening center equipped with tape recorder, record player, and headsets, where several children can listen to materials of their own choice, sometimes following along in a book or laughing over a funny story. In another area is an art center equipped with easels and paint, paper and crayons, scissors and paste. From the science center come splashing sounds and happy laughter as plastic-aproned children "dive in" at the water table, where the teaching aide has colored today's water a deep blue. Using various containers, funnels, and solid objects, they may play happily for hours--while discovering for themselves the concepts of size and volume, floating and sinking, solids and liquids. The mathematics center contains mathematical games, Cuisenaire rods, and counting blocks; and often children cluster around a table while a young teaching aide helps them put together geometric puzzles or use picture flash cards.

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Both Head Start and Follow Through classrooms contain many types of manipulative equipment designed to teach skills and concepts and to be self-correcting. They make the child aware of the correct solution without his having to consult the teacher.

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In addition, Follow Through classrooms for older children contain more advanced and didactic materials. There is a reading center with a variety of books and comfortable places for reading, and a writing center with paper and writing materials. Tacoma uses the Language Experience in Reading materials by Roach Van Allen, supplemented by "teaching episodes" outlined for the Responsive Environment Model.

Another important component of the responsive environment, used especially in providing reading readiness experiences, is the "learning booth." The booth contains a typewriter and is manned by a teaching aide, often a parent, who helps the child transcribe his own language onto the typewriter and works with him for about 10 minutes on activities involving letters and sound-sight relationships. Members of the teaching staff have been ingenious in creating space for learning booths, sometimes using an old closet.

Items used in other curriculum areas of the Follow Through classrooms include American Association for the Advancement of Science materials and Robert W. Wirtz's *Math Workshop*.

The Early Childhood Program has several components--Head Start day care centers, Head Start preschool classes, Follow Through kindergarten classes, Follow Through first-grade classes, and a primary enrichment program which extends through grade 3 and is supported by funds from title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PROGRAM

All children enrolled are from low-income areas, and each group of 20 youngsters has one teacher and at least one teacher aide.

HEAD START OFFERS DAY CARE CLASSES

The Head Start program has two components--day care centers and classes. Day care centers are located in two Tacoma schools where classrooms have been specially renovated for the program. Children are brought by working parents to the centers, where they receive full day care, which includes a Head Start preschool educational program. The regular Head Start classes are located in centers at 11 low-income area schools. Children at the centers are mostly 4-year-olds; a limited number of 3-year-olds are accepted.

The program attempts to draw together all those resources--family, community, and professional--which can contribute to the

child's total development. It utilizes the skills of persons in health, psychology, social work, and nutrition, as well as in education. A comprehensive medical program provides for employing two full-time nurses, for training three nurse's aides from the low-income population, and for the consulting services of a doctor. Children receive medical examinations at school, and medical services are often donated by community medical personnel. The nutritional program includes a daily snack and hot lunch for each child. Along with this care goes an educational program in which children learn and practice good health and nutrition habits.

Parents are also involved. Before the program begins, the teacher visits the home of each child and his family to welcome them to and acquaint them with the project. A parent advisory committee meets monthly, and often members of the program education or health staff attend to discuss their work. Each parent receives a personal invitation to visit the center several times in the year. Parent response has been good, and on these special days the visiting parent observes, joins in activities, and eats with the children. Parents help in other ways--fixing equipment, chaperoning field trips, acting as safety patrols, or working with the health programs.

FOLLOW THROUGH BUILDS ON HEAD START GAINS

Follow Through is essentially a continuation of the Head Start program, adjusted to meet the needs of boys and girls of kindergarten and first-grade age. In Follow Through, as in Head Start, classrooms are built around the Responsive Environment Model. Children move naturally from their preschool experiences in Head Start into regular school work, in which activities and evaluation are based on the same premises as in their previous education. There is a longer day with improved opportunities for systematic observation, planning, and evaluation. Within the Follow Through program, multiage grouping allows more individualization.

Also as in Head Start, there is a complete program of nutritional and medical-dental care and training, and parent involvement. Teachers welcome parents to the classroom and maintain contact through personal interviews. Parents are also invited to attend special presentations and events, sometimes helping out on these occasions. The parent advisory committee meets regularly and recommends changes and improvements in the program. Services of social workers and counselors are also available to children and their families.

TITLE I ESEA SUPPORTS PRIMARY EDUCATION

In a special effort to tie the total primary program more closely to what is being done in Head Start and Follow Through, the district has implemented a special primary enrichment program using title I funds. This program provides greater parent contact and involvement at the primary grade level, and special inservice training and workshops for teachers and aides. The schools are using a team-teaching approach, and one school has a completely nongraded "continuous progress" program.

STAFF STRUCTURE

All components of the Early Childhood Program are coordinated by a director and an associate director. Under these administrators are the program assistant for Head Start, including both the regular classes and day care centers, and two program assistants for Follow Through, one for kindergarten and one for first grade. Over 70 certified teachers and more than 70 aides work in the program, plus volunteers from the community and area colleges, elementary counselors, social workers, nurses, a doctor, psychologist, speech therapist, and psychometrist.

The program not only provides an enriched educational environment for children but also offers employment and training opportunities for members of the low-income indigenous population.

Teaching aides are often parents, or they may be young people with an interest in early childhood teaching, often recruited from Youth Corps programs. Tacoma participates in a consortium among three schools--the University of Puget Sound, Tacoma Lutheran University, and Tacoma Community College--which offers aides the opportunity to take courses while they are working and to eventually earn associate of arts or bachelor of arts degrees and full teacher accreditation. As they complete units of course work and gain experience in the program, aides move up on a specified career ladder. Those who become certified teachers will be qualified for a head teacher position in the program or to teach in any school system. Local program officials believe that certification as a requirement for head teacher positions, not common to all Head Start programs, provides those who progress through the program's career ladder with the advantages of an advanced educational background and credentials that make them employable anywhere.

ASSESSING THE PROGRAM'S EFFECTS

Since the entire Early Childhood Program, covering both preschool and the primary grades, has been available to Tacoma children for only 2 years, evaluation data on the long-range effects are not yet available. The response of children in the

classrooms, however, is easily observed--they are active and involved while working on their own.

Their parents have become involved in the program through seeing it work. As the director of the program has said, "The best way to get parents involved is to let them tackle something that *they* see needs to be done, not that *you* see needs to be done." School personnel report positive changes in attitudes and higher aspirations among those included in the program, both children and teachers.

Program staff members plan long-range evaluation using pre- and post-tests, and the Far West Laboratory will conduct evaluations of the Responsive Environment Model in the classrooms.

POOLING FUNDS FOR A LARGE-SCALE PROGRAM

The Early Childhood Program is financed by funds received under several Federal grants. The district receives approximately $450,000 from Head Start; $230,000 from Follow Through; and $640,000 from ESEA title I, 90 percent of which goes to the Early Childhood Program. In addition, some State and local school district funds are used, along with Urban-Racial-Disadvantaged (URD) funds and some ESEA title III funds. Program costs thus amount

to about $1,600 per child, about $900 over the base district cost of $700 per child. This cost includes the nutritional program, the cost for aides and staff training, and transportation of children to the centers.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Materials on the Early Childhood Program include reprints of two articles from State education journals; plus slides, a film, and accompanying tapes on Head Start and the Follow Through kindergarten and first grade. These materials are available from:

Mrs. Roberta LaCoste
Curriculum Assistant for Elementary Education
State Department of Public Instruction
Olympia, Washington 98501

For further information prior to a visit, contact:

Mr. James Robertson
Early Childhood Education Program
P.O. Box 1357
Tacoma, Washington 98401

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MODEL PROGRAMS--Childhood Education

This is one in a series of 34 descriptive booklets on childhood education programs prepared for the White House Conference on Children, December 1970. Following is a list of the programs and their locations:

The Day Nursery Assn. of Cleveland, Ohio
Neighborhood House Child Care Services, Seattle, Wash.
Behavior Analysis Model of a Follow Through Program, Oraibi, Ariz.
Cross-Cultural Family Center, San Francisco, Calif.
NRO Migrant Child Development Center, Pasco, Wash.
Bilingual Early Childhood Program, San Antonio, Tex.
Santa Monica Children's Centers, Calif.
Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction, Salt Lake City, Utah
Dubnoff School for Educational Therapy, North Hollywood, Calif.
Demonstration Nursery Center for Infants and Toddlers, Greensboro, N.C.
Responsive Environment Model of a Follow Through Program, Goldsboro, N.C.
Center for Early Development and Education, Little Rock, Ark.
DOVACK, Monticello, Fla.
Perceptual Development Center Program, Natchez, Miss.
Appalachia Preschool Education Program, Charleston, W. Va.
Foster Grandparent Program, Nashville, Tenn.
Hartford Early Childhood Program, Conn.
Philadelphia Teacher Center, Pa.
Cognitively Oriented Curriculum, Ypsilanti, Mich.
Mothers' Training Program, Urbana, Ill.
The Micro-Social Preschool Learning System, Vineland, N.J.
Project PLAN, Parkersburg, W. Va.
Interdependent Learner Model of a Follow Through Program, New York, N.Y.
San Jose Police Youth Protection Unit, Calif.
Model Observation Kindergarten, Amherst, Mass.
Boston Public Schools Learning Laboratories, Mass.
Martin Luther King Family Center, Chicago, Ill.
Behavior Principles Structural Model of a Follow Through Program, Dayton, Ohio
University of Hawaii Preschool Language Curriculum, Honolulu, Hawaii
Springfield Avenue Community School, Newark, N.J.
Corrective Reading Program, Wichita, Kans.
New Schools Exchange, Santa Barbara, Calif.
Tacoma Public Schools Early Childhood Program, Wash.
Community Cooperative Nursery School, Menlo Park, Calif.